

## CHINA'S AGRICULTURAL INVESTMENTS

A Source of Concern?

Jean-Raphaël Chaponnière, Jean-Jacques Gabas, Zheng Qi

De Boeck Supérieur | « Afrique contemporaine »

Volume 237, Issue 1, 2011 | from 71 to 83

ISSN 0002-0478

ISBN 9782804164973

---

The English version of this issue is published thanks to the support of the CNRS

---

Available online at :

---

<https://www.cairn-int.info/revue-afrique-contemporaine-2011-1-page-71.htm>

---

Electronic distribution by Cairn on behalf of De Boeck Supérieur.

© De Boeck Supérieur. All rights reserved for all countries.

Reproducing this article (including by photocopying) is only authorized in accordance with the general terms and conditions of use for the website, or with the general terms and conditions of the license held by your institution, where applicable. Any other reproduction, in full or in part, or storage in a database, in any form and by any means whatsoever is strictly prohibited without the prior written consent of the publisher, except where permitted under French law.

# China's Agricultural Investments A Source of Concern?

Jean-Raphaël Chaponnière, Jean-Jacques Gabas, Zheng Qi

**Agribusiness trade between China and Africa has increased since 2000. However, except for cotton, it remains limited in comparison with other sectors, notably manufacturing. Chinese foreign aid and agricultural investments also remain limited, as best can be determined, although they too have increased since the mid-2000s and now primarily center on internal national and regional African markets and less so on international export markets. These investments—whether public or private—should be monitored as they form part of China's foreign aid strategy, which looks far beyond farming.**

**Keywords:** China – Agribusiness trade – Foreign aid – Markets – Cotton

**S**ince the start of the twenty-first century, the growing presence of Chinese players in Africa has elicited some concern among traditional donors as well as citizens, based on perception surveys. This concern is fueled by several factors. Firstly, China is displacing the setting of international cooperation standards; it is breaking a number of historical monopolies; and it appears to be putting forward a “Beijing Consensus” in opposition to the “Washington Consensus.” It never refers to attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and never makes its aid conditional on any requirements for good governance or the holding of democratic elections. In this sense, China stands apart in all the countries where it is active<sup>1</sup> despite its presence in a working group on the standardization of aid in OECD-DAC. Its status as both a developing country and a major economic power is worrisome. This status allows

**Jean-Raphaël Chaponnière** is an economist at the Agence Française de Développement (AFD). He has worked as an economic advisor to South Korea and Turkey and as a researcher at the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS), the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore (ISEAS), and INSEAD Business School. His recent publications include “Chinese Aid to Africa: Origins, Forms, and Issues,” (in *The New Presence of*

*China in Africa*, ed. M. P. van Dijk, Amsterdam University Press, 2009, 55–92).

**Jean-Jacques Gabas** has a PhD in economics and is a lecturer and research fellow at Université Paris-Sud 11, currently on assignment as a researcher at the French Agricultural Research Center for Development (CIRAD). His work primarily pertains to cooperation policy. He is the author of *Nord-Sud: L'impossible coopération?* (Presses

de Sciences Po, 2002) and, more recently, “La fabrique de l'émergence” (in *Les pays émergents*, ed. Sciences Po/CERI, 2009).

**Zheng Qi** is an agronomist with a degree from Peking University and a Masters in Applied Sustainable Development from Université Paris-Dauphine. She has participated in several AFD and CIRAD studies of relations between China and Africa.

it to build new alliances at major international summits, such as the recent climate summit. Furthermore, there is increasing concern as a result of the secrecy surrounding the production of data on the amounts of both development aid and direct investments, the terms and conditions of loans, and the presence of Chinese nationals in beneficiary countries. This opacity further fuels fears.

Is this concern justified? It would be futile to overlook the fact that Chinese interventions south of the Sahara are a reality in the fields of urban infrastructure (Mali, Niger, and Senegal), mining (uranium in Niger), the oil industry (Angola, Gabon, and Chad), and the forestry sector (chiefly in the Congo Basin countries). However, it is important to debunk the myths driven by this Chinese presence, including the notion that the goal of China's investments and technical cooperation in African agriculture is to meet its own growing food requirements. What is the truth of the matter as concerns the agricultural sector? What is the reality of Chinese interventions in agriculture in view of the myths driven by both the media<sup>2</sup> and traditional donors and even by some African political leaders? To answer these questions, this paper will first explore trade relations between China and Africa in the field of agriculture, which is a modest, but growing, component of Sino-African trade. It will then provide a presentation of Chinese aid to African agriculture, as best can be determined, given the shortage of available data sources. Finally, it will analyze the purposes of public and private Chinese investments in agriculture, and in particular, land acquisitions.

## Sino-African Trade in Agricultural Products

**Chinese and African Agriculture in the Global Marketplace.** In the 1980s, agriculture accounted for a quarter of all Chinese exports. By 2008, this proportion had plummeted to 3%, at a time when agricultural products represented 5% of imports. One characteristic of Chinese agriculture is its very low degree of openness, with imports accounting for 6% of apparent consumption (defined as the sum of all imports and production less all exports), and with 5% of its production being exported. This means that China is not dependent on the global marketplace for its food.

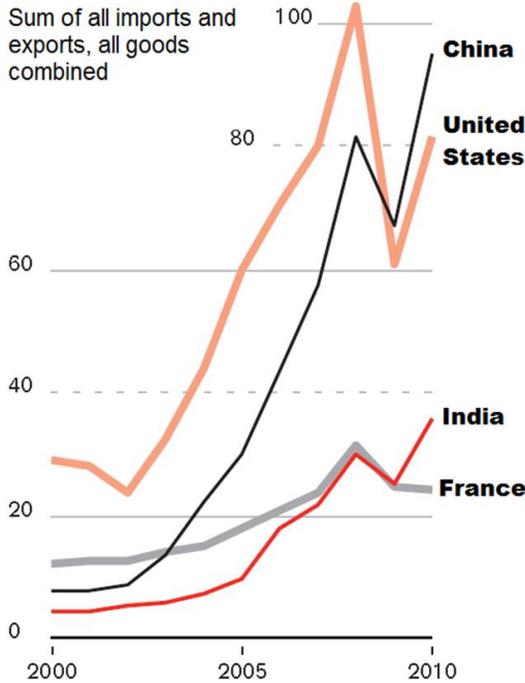
**1** China maintains diplomatic relations with all Sub-Saharan countries, with the exception of Burkina Faso, Gambia, Swaziland, and São Tomé and Príncipe.  
**2** See in particular the special edition of *Jeune Afrique*, "Agro-alimentaire: L'Afrique aiguisé les appétits," March 2, 2011.  
**3** Imports are subject to a system of automatic licenses. The average tariff for first-stage processed agricultural products is 12%, 24% for semi-finished goods, and 16% for processed foods (WTO).

**4** According to World Development Indicators data.  
**5** To take this initial assessment of complementarity a step further, we used two indicators designed to measure the similarity of exports and to assess complementarity between African exports (imports) and Chinese imports (exports): the Finger Kreinin Similarity Index, and the Linneman Indicator. These indicators were calculated for 2000 and 2007, using FAO's database (with 480 line items). The degree of similarity between the structure of African

agricultural exports and Chinese imports was very low and changed little between 2000 and 2007. Conversely, the structure of Chinese exports is comparable to that of African imports. An analysis conducted in Eastern and Southern African countries led IFPRI to the conclusion that Chinese demand has little impact on African supply (Nelson Villoria et al., 2009, *China's Growth and the Agricultural Exports of Southern Africa*, Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute).

## Trade between selected countries and Africa (2000-2010)

In billions of US dollars



Source: Global Trade Atlas, [www.gtis.com](http://www.gtis.com)

Sciences Po Cartography Studio/Afrique Contemporaine, May 2011

China's entry into the WTO was accompanied by a spectacular increase in the importation of soybeans, oils, cotton, and wool, although China has remained a net exporter of cereals.<sup>3</sup> While Chinese imports have become highly concentrated, its exports have been diversified. The main trade partners for Chinese agriculture are Asia and NAFTA for exports, and Asia and South America for imports. Africa plays a minor role in terms of both Chinese imports and exports of agricultural goods.

According to the Chelem database at the Research Center for Prospective Studies and International Information (CEPII), Sub-Saharan Africa's share of worldwide trade in agricultural goods is similar to that of China (6%). However, this average means very little in the case of Africa, where agriculture plays a very important role in many countries' exports: Malawi (85%), Burkina Faso (83%), Uganda (62%), Ethiopia (61%), Mali (56%), Kenya (46%), Rwanda (44%), Ghana (42%), Senegal (37%), Tanzania (35%), Madagascar (31%), Togo (29%), Swaziland (21%), and Niger (14%).<sup>4</sup> With regard to African imports of agricultural goods, these doubled between 2000 and 2007. Moreover, African exports and Chinese imports are particularly complementary.<sup>5</sup>

**Trade in Agricultural Products.** Trade in agricultural products accounts for a very small proportion of Sino-African trade, although this increased twelve-fold between 2000 and 2010. After rising rapidly between 2000 and 2004, Chinese imports of African agricultural products stagnated, while Chinese exports to Africa increased, as did China's surplus with Africa.

An analysis of Sino-African trade performed at a very detailed level (four-digit nomenclature) reveals significant asymmetry. Chinese imports are highly concentrated, and the relative weight of the first five lines did not vary between 2000 and 2008. Meanwhile, the decline in the value of cotton imports is one of the main reasons for the stagnation of African exports to China. Over the course of the past two years, there has been a sharp increase in the importation of cacao and oils. While African cacao was dominating the Chinese market (66% of imports), the figures for African cotton were falling.

Rice and tea have traditionally been China's exports to Africa, although these have diversified since 2000 with the emergence of new products (such as tomatoes and vegetables). Although Africa is only a marginal market for Chinese agriculture, it absorbs 40% of its rice exports (to West Africa) and 46% of its tea exports (to North and West Africa). Africa, whose exports are not particularly complementary to Chinese imports, took little advantage of the very rapid boom in Chinese demand. Conversely, Chinese agricultural exports, which are competitive on the global marketplace, rose rapidly on the African market.

**Outlook for Future Trade Developments.** Chinese agriculture is facing a large number of constraints in terms of supply (land, water, and labor), while urbanization and demographics are expected to lead to changes in the diets of Chinese households, thereby affecting demand. According to the low, median, and high scenarios developed by the United Nations, growth in the Chinese population is expected to reach 75 to 230 million between 2010 and 2030. If the measures aimed at curbing rural exodus (the *hukou* system) are loosened, urbanization will increase rapidly. Furthermore, urbanization and rising incomes will also modify the structure of Chinese demand. Over the course of the past 10 years, the most significant changes have been the increased consumption of meat, fruit, vegetables, and dairy products and a decrease in cereal consumption. According to Chinese forecasts for 2030, the per capita consumption of cereals is expected to fall by 10%, with a substantial rise in the consumption of dairy products and vegetables and no change in meat consumption.

Other scenarios predict that rising income levels in China will trigger a rapid increase in the consumption of meat products, which in turn will affect Chinese imports.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, population increases and urbanization

<sup>6</sup> Agrimonde (2009) developed two long-term scenarios through 2050. With regard to Asia, it predicts a more pronounced shift toward the

consumption of meat products, which will increase demand for cereals and oilseeds, while total arable land will decrease. According to this source,

China could become a major importer of cereals and oilseeds. In Africa, potential arable land is five times larger than the 200 million hectares

## **A Brief Introduction to Chinese and African Agriculture**

China is the third largest country in the world after Russia and Canada. With arable land of just 122 million hectares (8% of the total surface of the planet), China feeds 20% of the world's population. The reforms of 1978 transferred responsibility for production to the farmers, but without giving them any land ownership rights. China has 200 million farms covering an average of a mere 0.6 hectares each. Investments in rural infrastructure and a high literacy rate both contributed to the success of the first reforms. These were followed by the liberalization of pricing and markets in the 1990s once agricultural production had taken off. It should be recalled that although Chinese agriculture enjoys high yields, the farmers themselves are poor because their productivity is one-sixth that of non-agricultural activities. This gap is one of the reasons for the difference in income levels between cities and the countryside. Fighting this imbalance has been a government priority since 2003. Chinese agriculture has been able to respond to rapidly increasing demand. For most of the population, the available food and its nutritional quality have improved. In 2000, food supply stood at 3,040 kcal/day, higher than the global average (8%) as well as the average in developing countries.

Sub-Saharan Africa has twice as much arable land (219 million hectares), covering 16% of its total area. Although this land is suited to a wide variety of crops, only 1% of it is irrigated. While general statements about agriculture in the 53 African countries should be avoided, the fact remains that a common constraint on development has been a lack of political interest and the authorities' belief that family farming could not contribute to economic transformation. Moreover, unlike what was observed in China, international aid has had a pronounced influence on agricultural policy, and aid has funded a significant proportion of investments in the sector.

While Chinese agriculture is essentially a commercial activity, this is not the case with African agriculture, which is far more often related to personal subsistence. For example, it is estimated that only about 25% of the cereals produced in Africa (sorghum and millet) are sold on the market. Recent research by the World Bank based on a survey conducted in several countries has shown that although African producers are competitive on their domestic markets, they are not competitive internationally. Their domestic competitiveness can be explained by the very low remuneration they receive for their work (due to a lack of alternatives) and limited access to the purchase of inputs. Furthermore, the high cost of transportation, which increases the price of imported products, serves as a form of natural protection. Meanwhile, those high costs, which need to be absorbed by exporters, are also a handicap on exports.

could reduce total arable land to 120 million hectares. According to IIASA and FAO, the main constraint is less the availability of land than the availability of water, although some room for maneuver could be achieved through better use of resources. Furthermore, since the 1980s, the Chinese government has been funding important biotechnological research in the interest of food safety (in which China is a leader). IIASA and FAO estimate that China has sufficient land and water resources to produce enough cereals and feed a population of 1.48 billion while reserving one-quarter of its land for fruits and vegetables. However, China might for economic reasons elect to import a portion of its cereal requirements. According to Zhao, China's self-sufficiency ratio could attain 95% in 2030, with China importing 30 to 35 million tons of cereals. As Zhao comments,

Even with increased agricultural science and technology inputs as well as policy inputs ensuring the current production level of 500 million tons will remain a severe challenge, with Guangdong and Zhejiang provinces having become the major rice importers.

In 1995, Lester Brown published *Who Will Feed China? Wake-Up Call for a Small Planet*, in which he concluded that China will need to make use of international markets in order to respond to the demands of a wealthier population.<sup>7</sup> Since then, not only has Chinese agriculture met demand, but China has remained a net exporter of cereals. In the coming years, if the decline in cereal production is accompanied by a decline in consumption, China may be able to continue being a net exporter and, unless there is a strong increase in yields, might even become a net importer of corn. In the case of soy, imports provide for three quarters of domestic demand, and most forecasts predict a rise in those imports. Nonetheless, Bryan Lohmar estimates that the introduction of genetically modified organisms (GMO) could reduce the need for imports. Meanwhile, China will remain a major importer of oilseeds and sugar, and its production of fruits and vegetables should increase in parallel to demand. According to Rozelle, the availability of water as well as land and wage levels will act as a constraint on Chinese competitiveness in this sector: As Rozelle comments,

currently in use. However, given changing yields and demographic growth, Africa is expected to remain a food importer. Asia and Africa will be reliant on exports from Latin America, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and the OECD countries.

<sup>7</sup> Lester Brown, *Who Will Feed China? Wake-up Call for a Small Planet* (New York: W.W. Norton/

Worldwatch Institute, Environmental Alert Series).

<sup>8</sup> Taking a global approach to textile trading between China and Africa from the production of cotton to its weaving, it can be seen that the African deficit has risen considerably, with Africa exporting 180,000 tons of cotton worth \$300 million to China in 2008 and importing 118,000 tons of

cotton thread and fabric worth \$2 billion. This challenge may be even more severe if exports of Chinese cotton clothing to Africa are taken into account. This very rapid increase in the exportation of thread and fabric to Africa suggests the existence of import substitution potential for the Chinese in Africa.

Until that time, however, there will be a race between China's ability to supply what consumers want and the increasing pace of domestic demand. If the supply side wins, China's producers will enjoy the fruits of both supplying the large domestic market and exporting. If the demand side pulls ahead, there will be opportunities for international horticultural producers to sell to China's market.

While uncertainties remain over China's capacity to cover its long-term food requirements, the most dynamic Chinese imports are not products exported by Africa. Although this conclusion does not open up any new opportunities for Africa, an analysis of Chinese exports to Africa reveals the existence of import substitution opportunities. This is the case, for example, with cotton, of which China is the leading global producer as well as the top importer. For its part, Africa is a modest producer of cotton that exports a large share of its production for want of a competitive textile industry. According to ICAC, Chinese cotton imports rose dramatically between 2003 and 2006, after which they declined in both value and quantity. Over the same period, African exports were cut in half (from one million to half a million tons). According to the UN Comtrade database, China is the largest market for African cotton processed into thread and fabric. However, a significant proportion of those exports return to Africa, where they are used by craftsmen and the clothing industry. Thus, while Africa's share of Chinese cotton imports fell from 25% in 2005 to 9% in 2008, its share of Chinese exports of cotton thread and fabric rose to 26% in 2008.<sup>8</sup> Given these trade relations, which are on the rise but only for specific products, how can China's development aid policy in Africa's agricultural sector be assessed? Is there an intervention strategy that will have long-term effects?

### **Chinese Actions in African Agriculture**

**Chinese Aid: Evolution through Continuity.** China began its support to agriculture in Africa when it offered food aid to Guinea in 1959. Since that time, Sino-African cooperation in agriculture has gone through three stages, characterized by overall continuity from a project-oriented approach to a more institutionalized approach.

During the 1960s and 1970s, China helped build a large number of farms in Africa, including, for example, the Mbarali and Tuvu farms in Tanzania, Fano in Somalia, Chipemba in Uganda, rice farms in Beam Mpoli (Mauritania), land developments in Niger, and sugarcane plantations in Koba (Guinea), Mali, Togo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Sierra Leone. Overall, these projects covered a total of 43,400 hectares. This agricultural aid was managed by Chinese experts. However, this form of aid was considered unsustainable because the projects ran into difficulties once they were transferred to the host countries' governments.

Beginning in the mid-1980s, most agricultural projects evolved into joint ventures as part of a strategy of internationalization. The Chinese government encouraged this development by allowing companies (particularly State companies) to participate in foreign aid projects. This was how, for example, China's State Farm and its provincial subsidiaries became involved in the reorganization of farms in Africa. The Chinese approach thus evolved from a State-centric model to a model based on companies supported by the government. A number of farms were built in accordance with this new paradigm. In Zambia, farms operated by Sino-Zambia Friendship, Xiyangyang, and Sunshine China State Farm Group Jiangsu Cultivation Co. are managed by Chinese executives, employ local farmers, and sell their products only on the local markets.

The third period began in 2000 with the creation of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). As part of the process of expanding the number of South-South cooperation programs, China became involved in multilateral arrangements. By the end of 2005, 145 agricultural aid projects had been set up in the form of the construction of farms, experimental stations, technology demonstration centers, and the dispatch of agricultural experts. At the end of 2008, Chinese companies had invested in and set up 72 agricultural companies, for a total Chinese contribution of \$134 million.<sup>9</sup> Throughout these periods, Chinese aid was characterized by the dispatch of agricultural experts and the creation of agricultural extension centers.<sup>10</sup> At present, the priorities of China's African policy as regards agriculture tend toward land development, cattle farming techniques, food safety, farming equipment, agribusiness, and the strengthening of technological cooperation.<sup>11</sup> China has created new tools that combine development aid with other forms of financial commitments. The Chinese Export Import Bank uses soft loans and preferential lines of credit to finance Chinese companies' investments abroad. The Chinese government has placed priority on agro-industrial projects in subsistence farming, aquaculture, and farming implements. In 2007, the China-Africa Development Fund was created to support Chinese investments in Africa. In 2009, this fund began

**9** "China Maintains Investment Cooperation Intensity with Africa," Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, November 2, 2009. Accessed from [www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng)

**10** The arrival of Chinese agricultural experts in Africa dates back to the 1960s. This was a response to requests from countries such as Mali and Uganda, and was considered a form of aid for the development of African agriculture under bilateral and multilateral programs. Since joining South-South cooperation efforts in 2006 and until the end of 2007, China sent 15 groups of technical personnel (or 496 field experts) to 36 countries. In a bilateral

contexts, the Chinese government has sent 100 experts to some 30 countries since the 2006 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation. These experts were typically integrated into Departments of Agriculture or Agencies rather than Ministries (unlike technical assistance from France). Following the 2006 China-Africa Forum, the Chinese government planned to create 20 centers in Africa, 14 of which are currently under construction in Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, Zambia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Togo, Benin, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Liberia. See

Bräutigam and Xiaoyang, "China's Engagement," 686-706.

**11** "China's African Policy," January 2006. Accessed from [www.fmprc.gov](http://www.fmprc.gov)

**12** Chinese Embassy in Malawi. Accessed from [www.chineseembassy.org](http://www.chineseembassy.org)

**13** "Livre blanc de gouvernance foncière et sécurité de tenure dans les pays en développement," *Coopération Française de Développement*, June 2009.

**14** "China Development Gateway, Africa: Top Option for China's Agricultural Investment." Accessed from: [www.chinagate.cn](http://www.chinagate.cn)

**15** (2008). Accessed from [www.hiseed.com](http://www.hiseed.com)

its largest agricultural project in Malawi, in cooperation with two Chinese companies. It plans to invest \$25 million in planting and processing cotton, and exporting it to China. An estimated 50,000 family farms are the beneficiaries of this project.<sup>12</sup> More recently, this project approach, which has naturally evolved since the early 1960s, has been accompanied by other forms of public and private action, especially land acquisitions.<sup>13</sup>

### History of Land Acquisition

Land acquisition began during the colonial period and, after obtaining independence, African governments agreed to the appropriation of land by transnational companies for the production of rubber, palm oil, bananas, and pineapples without implementing any land regularization programs. However, these decisions have been a source of conflict with the local communities that cultivated that land.<sup>14</sup> By contrast, the acquisitions that took place during the 2000s differed from earlier actions because they were on a greater scale and they often pursued the objective of food safety, even if a growing number of acquisitions pertain to the development of biofuels and soy for export.

The acquiring countries include some that are rich in capital, tend to import foodstuffs, and suffer from land and water resource constraints (the Gulf countries and Libya), major countries where food safety could become a problem (China, South Korea, Japan, and India), and the OECD countries plus Brazil, which look to produce biofuels on a large scale. Moreover, China, India, and Egypt are simultaneously investors and investment recipients.

According to IFPRI, from 2006 to mid-2009, foreign investors were in negotiations for (or had already acquired) some 15 to 20 million hectares of farmland in developing countries. A study of five African countries (Ethiopia, Ghana, Madagascar, Mali, and Sudan) concluded that approximately 2.5 million hectares of acquisitions had taken place since 2004, not including land covering fewer than 1,000 hectares.

According to reports by the Chinese government, Chinese investments in African agriculture, which date back to the 1990s, primarily aim to resolve the issue of food safety in Africa and to build those countries' capacities for developing their agriculture. Although the Chinese government does not interfere in State companies' decisions, it does support them both financially and diplomatically. It encourages Chinese companies to invest in African agriculture in a variety of forms, including the setting up of joint ventures (with State or private companies) and subsidiaries.<sup>15</sup> These investments can be broken down into three categories. The first concerns investments by State-owned companies, among which the China State Farms Agribusiness Corporation (CSFAC) is considered a role model. Beginning in 1990, CSFAC has conducted eleven agricultural, cattle farming, and food processing projects in Zambia, Guinea, Tanzania, Gabon, Ghana, Mali, Togo, and Mauritania, across a total of 16,000 hectares of land. Another State company, China's ZTE Agribusiness

Company Ltd., plans to develop 100,000 hectares of palm oil plantations in the DRC for the production of biofuel.<sup>16</sup> More recently, ZTE obtained 10,000 hectares of land from the Sudanese government on which to improve wheat and corn yields.

The second category represents investments by provincial players such as Shanxi Province Agribusiness Group, which obtained a 90-year lease for 5,000 hectares of land in Cameroon and has invested \$62.5 million to grow rice and cassava and breed ostriches. Hubei Agribusiness Group leases 1,000 hectares of land in Mozambique in cooperation with China Cereal and Oil Corporation to grow rice, cotton, soybeans, and vegetables.<sup>17</sup> While the operations undertaken by CSFAC and its subsidiaries are considered foreign aid, other provincial companies have commercial activities, including Chongqing Seed, which has a 300-hectare rice plantation in Tanzania.

Finally, there is a multitude of individual initiatives that are difficult to measure but whose impact must not be ignored. As can be seen, the nature of Chinese investments in Africa is highly diverse as some are managed by the central government along with transfers of technical assistance while others are handled by provincial companies with the support of financial institutions such as the China-Africa Development Fund or through incentives offered by the host countries, including Zimbabwe and Zambia.

## Questions Raised

Chinese investments in African agriculture bring in capital and technology. The projects implemented through the mid-2000s introduced water-saving and soil preservation practices as well as others that boast many benefits. However, more reservations have been expressed concerning newer projects. As a result, of the 34 major projects tracked by IFPRI in Africa between 2006 and 2009, four Chinese projects have been the subject of debate. The first is located in Mozambique, where the initial intention may have been to settle a large number of Chinese people to manage large farms and pastureland. According to Loro Horta and Stephen Marks, a memorandum of understanding was signed in June 2007 providing for the settlement of 3,000 Chinese in the provinces of Zamezia and Tet along a valley considered to be one of the most fertile. However, faced with the reactions sparked by this announcement, the Mozambican government changed its mind, and the Chinese are now thought to be considering a joint venture involving the participation of Mozambican capital. The second project involves 2 million hectares intended for the cultivation of biofuels in Zambia. The third concerns a palm oil plantation in the

<sup>16</sup> Bräutigam and Xiaoyang, "China's Engagement."

<sup>17</sup> Ron Sandrey and Hannah Edinger, *The Relevance of Chinese*

*Agricultural Technologies for African Smallholder Farmers: Agricultural Technology Research in China* (Stellenbosch, South Africa: Center

for Chinese Studies (CCS)/African Agricultural Technology Foundation, 2009).

**Tableau 1 – CSFAC investments in African agriculture**

| Date | Farm   | Country  | Size (ha)                  | Land Use  | Market        |
|------|--|----------|----------------------------|---|---------------|
| 1990 | Friendly Farm                                  | Zambia   | 620                        | Wheat, corn, soy, milk, pork, etc.                        | Local         |
| 1994 | Zhong Ken Farm                                 | Zambia   | 3,600                      | Poultry, beef, pork, milk                                 | Local         |
| 1999 | Zhong Ken Friendly Farm                        | Zambia   | 2,600 (1,500, arable land) | Wheat, vegetables, beef, cows, milk, poultry, aquaculture | Export to DRC |
| 1999 | Sino-Tanzania Corp.                            | Tanzania | 5,900                      | Sisal   | International |
| 1998 | Koba Farm                                      | Guinea   | 1,800                      | Rice  | Local         |
| 1998 | China Agriculture, Husbandry and Fishery Corp. | Ghana    |                            | Cacao processing  | International |
|      | Located at Mishanto flooding district          | Togo     |                            | Agricultural technology services                          | Local         |
|      | Tapioca Food Factory                           | Gabon    |                            | Rice, cassava processing                                  | Local         |

Source : Interview with Han Xiangshan, Vice-President of Zhongken Group.

**Tableau 2 – Chinese investments in African agriculture**

| Date | Farm or Investor                   | Country      | Size (ha) | Land Use                      | Market        |
|------|------------------------------------|--------------|-----------|-------------------------------|---------------|
| 2006 | Sino Cam Iko Company               | Cameroon     | 10,000    | Rice, vegetables, cassava     | Local         |
| 2007 | Shanxi Province Agribusiness Group | Cameroon     | 5,000     | Rice, cassava, ostrich        | Local         |
| 1997 | Koba Farm                          | Guinea       | 1,800     | Hybrid rice                   | Local         |
| 1967 | M'pourie                           | Mauritania   | 1,400     | Rice                          | Local         |
| 1961 | Farako                             | Mali         | 400       | Tea                           | Local         |
| 1996 | Sukala Refinery                    | Mali         | 6,000     | Sugar                         | Local         |
| 2008 | Sukala Refinery                    | Mali         | 10,000    | Sugar                         | Local         |
| 2005 | Hubei Agribusiness Group           | Mozambique   | 1,000     | Rice, cotton, soy, vegetables | Local         |
| 2008 |                                    | Senegal      | 35,000    | Sesame                        | China         |
| 1977 | Magbass Sugar                      | Sierra Leone | 1,280     | Sugar                         | Local         |
| 1969 | Mubarali Rice Farm                 | Tanzania     | 6,000     | Rice, pork, cows, poultry     | Local         |
| 1970 | Ruvu Rice Farm                     | Tanzania     | 800       | Rice                          | Local         |
|      | Morogoro                           | Tanzania     | 6,900     | Sisal                         | International |
| 2009 | Chongqing Seed                     | Tanzania     | 300       | Rice                          | Local         |
|      | Complex Sucier d'Anie              | Togo         | 1,200     | Sugar                         | Local         |
| 1973 | Tilda (formerly Kibimba)           | Uganda       | 700       | Rice                          | Local         |
| 1987 | Doha Rice                          | Uganda       | 800       | Rice                          | Local         |
| 2009 | ZTE                                | DRC          | 100,000   | Palm oil                      | International |
| 2010 | ZTE                                | Sudan        | 10,000    | Wheat, corn                   | N/A           |
| 2010 | N/A                                | Zimbabwe     | 100,000   | N/A                           | N/A           |

DRC, where, although the media announced the leasing of 2.8 million hectares, the project now affects an area of just 100,000 hectares.<sup>18</sup> The last project under negotiation, which has been the subject of local criticism, concerns 10,000 hectares for rice cultivation in Cameroon.

Outside of the African continent, the Chinese have large-scale investment projects that pursue food safety or commercial objectives, including in the Philippines, Brazil, Laos, and Myanmar.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, the possibility that something similar might someday occur in Africa cannot be excluded. This brief analysis of large-scale land acquisitions in Africa shows that, although these interventions are nothing new, they have intensified in recent years. However, it is difficult to measure their scope given that announcements of acquisitions are not always followed through. Nor is it easy to assess agricultural practices (whether or not labor-intensive or whether or not the sustainability of agro-ecological systems is considered). The available information seems to indicate that Chinese investments are targeting the (local or regional) African market, not the Chinese market. However, the exception to this rule may be the investments announced for the production of biofuel for the European market, although, given the current state of information, this assumption will need to be verified. Lastly, while announcements of Chinese land acquisitions in Africa appear to have become increasingly frequent in the past two or three years, their volume does not exceed 3–4% of the total land acquired in Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>20</sup>

More generally, the China-OECD/DAC working group, which held its third conference in Bamako, Mali on April 27 and 28, 2010 on the future of agriculture in Africa, has clearly shown that China will be present in Sub-Saharan Africa's agricultural sector through its public and private players in the years to come. Investments will take a variety of forms, including interventions in the field of agricultural extension work. As was confirmed by a number of contacts, the primary objective of agricultural production will not be to satisfy the needs of the Chinese domestic market. For the Chinese authorities, food safety on the African continent and the eradication of poverty can guarantee political stability and are a means of pursuing an investment policy in other sectors (mining and petroleum, for example) that are considered to be priorities for the Chinese economy.

**18** Bräutigam and Xiaoyang, "China's Engagement."

**19** According to Brian McCartan, China is involved in a project to lease a million hectares in Indonesia and Papua New Guinea for eight years (via the China National Offshore Oil Corp. and other companies) to

cultivate palm oil trees, sugarcane, and cassava. In August 2007, a \$1 billion investment was approved in Laos to plant 35,100 hectares of rubber trees for the Chinese market. China is also the second most important trading partner of Myanmar, which exports rice from the

Shan State to China. "China Farms Abroad," *Asia Sentinel* 1(2008). Accessed from: [www.asiasentinel.com/index.php?option=comcontent&task=view&id=1361&Itemid=32](http://www.asiasentinel.com/index.php?option=comcontent&task=view&id=1361&Itemid=32)

**20** ILC, Ward Anseeuw, and CIRAD